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# IT-Enabled Transformations: You've Read the Stories, Now See the Movie

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# IT-ENABLED TRANSFORMATIONS: YOU'VE READ THE STORIES, NOW SEE THE MOVIE

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## **Abstract**

*This panel discusses the decline in the information systems field and argues that an emphasis on the major transformations enabled by technology will help rekindle interest and excitement about the technology. We will discuss a documentary on IT-enabled transformations that the Smith School at the University of Maryland is co-producing with Maryland Public Television for viewing on public television stations around the U.S. The audience will preview a short segment from the documentary and panelists will present what they learned about transformations in creating the show. Panel members will also comment on how this material, which includes a website and a book, can be used in the classroom.*

## **The Panel**

*"[...] every process will become digital, mobile, virtual; every process....It must happen to the process of healthcare. It is happening to the process of education. Every physical process will become digital, mobile, virtual."*<sup>1</sup>

-Carly Fiorina, former Chairman and CEO, Hewlett-Packard

*"[...] we are entering a phase where we are going to see the digitization, virtualization, and automation of almost everything. The gains in productivity will be staggering for those countries, companies and individuals who can absorb the new technological tools."*<sup>2</sup>

-Thomas L. Friedman, author columnist, *New York Times*

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<sup>1</sup> Carly Fiorina, Oct. 10, 2003, CIO Forum, Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland

<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 45.

The information systems field is in a state of decline with dropping enrollments, IS courses eliminated from the MBA core, and a poor employment outlook for new Ph.D.s seeking academic positions. One of the reasons for this decline is the disconnect between what IS academics teach and publish as rigorous research, and the incredible transformations IT enables. Stories about these transformations can be found weekly in articles in the business press like *The Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times* and *BusinessWeek*.

These articles chronicle the challenges from new technology-based business models in settings like the recorded music industry, video content providers, newspapers, advertising agencies and travel agents. At the same time the technology has made new business models possible, models like those of Amazon, e-Bay, MySpace, Facebook, Google, Yahoo and Second Life.

The extraordinary technological developments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have brought organizations of every size an unprecedented ability to transform themselves. The fundamentals of business and the economy are changing in every market, in every industry and in every nation. A technology transformation can be a major opportunity for an organization, or it can be a tremendous threat to its survival and to the future of its employees and the community around it.

Do these transformations play an important role in our classes? Do we develop frameworks for how students should look for and cope with disruptive technologies? Is our research at all relevant to what is happening in industry after industry? The purpose of this panel is to help faculty develop and integrate material on IT transformations into their teaching and research.

In order to educate the public at large and to provide material for IS curricula, The Smith School at the University of Maryland and Maryland and Maryland Public Television are co-producing a documentary to inform and educate a wide audience about the implications of IT-enabled transformations, which are taking place more rapidly than anyone every imagined. The project consists of three components: a television documentary, a Web site and a book.

The script treatment describes our vision for the show:

“Join Robert X. Cringely, writer, commentator and host of “*Triumph of the Nerds*”, “*Electric Money*” and “*Nerd TV*” as he explores the past, present and very near future of significant IT-enabled transformations. What will be the next big thing? Who will take advantage of it? And why could it affect us all? His journey reveals the dreams, opportunities and threats in this technology-driven, global economy.

Containing both walking and seated interviews in multiple locations across the country, the show will be edited in a quick modern fashion with various styles of upbeat contemporary music. Cringely will be an active participant in this

program, visiting these locations and interviewing his subjects in person. The show will also contain a fun graphic style, adding the host to animated elements in a few instances. It will also include archival footage of moments in information technology history. While the main theme will be divided into sections, each will connect with the next, woven together by the primary subject of information technology.”

The show is scheduled to air on most of the public TV stations in the U.S. in April of 2008. The DVD of the program will be available through Maryland Public Television, and the Smith School will host a web site that makes each vignette available for downloading to play in the classroom. There will be an accompanying book containing material that is not on the DVD.

### **Panel Agenda.**

Introduction	Hank Lucas
Selected Clips from the documentary	
Comments on producing video content	Hank Lucas
How do you develop and integrate material on transformation into the classroom	Varun Grover
Reflections on IT-enabled transformations from the narrator’s perspective	Bob Cringely
How to try this at home	Frank Batavick

Each speaker will encourage questions and discussion from the floor.

**Hank Lucas, Robert H. Smith Professor of Information Systems, University of Maryland (Producer and Writer):** Introduction to the project and previews of selected vignettes from the DVD. He will discuss the effort and time involved in producing the documentary and how faculty can be encouraged and rewarded for this kind of work.

**Robert X. Cringely (Narrator and Writer):** Thoughts on IT-enabled transformations from writing, interviewing, and narrating the documentary. What are the most important facets of a transformation? Where are some of the organizations we observed likely to be in the next five years? What kinds of services and products are on the horizon?

**Frank Batavic, Maryland Public Television (Producer and Director):** What is it really like to make a documentary? Is this a new source of teaching and research content? Should you try this at home? How an a faculty member produce videos for class on a smaller scale?

**Varun Grover, William S. Lee Distinguished Professor of Information Systems, Clemson University (Senior Editor, *MIS Quarterly*):** How can the transformation theme be incorporated into our classes? How can a faculty member make use of material like the documentary for teaching? What other sources are there? How can we share teaching materials?